

VZCZCXRO0515  
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHBK #2407/01 1192321  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 292321Z APR 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6530  
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 3495  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002407

SIPDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS EAP/PD (Davies), EAP/MLS, DRL, IIP/G/EAP EMILY  
KENEALY

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: TiTV: The BBC-ification of Thailand's "Independent"  
Television Station

REF: BANGKOK 01203 and previous

BANGKOK 00002407 001.2 OF 002

11. (SBU) Summary: The Thai cabinet has decided to re-establish TiTV, the TV station seized from Shin Corp., as a public television station in the image of BBC or PBS. Station staffers are concerned that the move will lead to a reduction in salaries and production quality, while former station executives and shareholders are threatening law suits. Some of the media experts charged with drafting the laws to establish a public television station are requesting assistance from the Embassy in the form of a DVC with an American public television expert. End summary.

12. (SBU) On April 24, 2007, the Thai Cabinet announced its intention to turn iTV -- now renamed TiTV or Thailand Independent Television -- into a commercial-free "public" station. TiTV, seized by the government in February from Shin Corp., had proved impossible to sell after the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) refused to renegotiate massive fines assessed on the station following the coup. (Note: See reftels for more detail. Shin Corp. was the company sold by deposed Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to Singapore's Temasek. The fines were the result of a 2006 court order which invalidated a 2004 arbitration court decision drastically reducing the station's licensing fees. End note.)

13. (SBU) PMO Minister Dhipavadee Meksawan said the new public broadcast station will be run by professional broadcasters, not government officials. She proposed a special earmarked tax to fund the station's operations in order to prevent political and corporate editorial interference. The PMO expects to finish a draft law establishing the public station by May 11, for forwarding to the National Legislative Assembly (NLA).

14. (SBU) The Cabinet decision to make TiTV a public station resulted from heavy pressure from prominent Thai mass communication academics who hope to turn TiTV into something resembling BBC or PBS. These pundits see American and English public broadcasters as good models for media free of government interference.

Opposition from within TiTV  
-----

15. (SBU) TiTV staff, used to high private-sector salaries and a modern corporate work environment, is not pleased with the decision. One news editor told PDoff that many production professionals, especially those in the news department, felt uncomfortable about the prospect of working in a government bureaucracy. He thought that TiTV would never become a true public station, and would instead morph into something akin to state-owned government mouthpiece Channel 11.

¶16. (SBU) A manager at the station noted other possible problems. TiTV's operating costs are extremely high. Currently, even with advertisements the station was running at a loss and staff had not been paid since March. He thought it was inevitable that the production quality and salaries had to fall. He also said that making TiTV a public company would eliminate many jobs, including sales staff, marketers, and other business-related positions.

#### Court Cases Continue

¶17. (SBU) At the annual shareholders' meeting on April 23, former iTV executives vowed to sue the PMO. They alleged that when iTV was seized, the PMO had failed to inform the cabinet that iTV and the PMO had a long-standing agreement that justified the original concession fee reduction. (Note: The agreement had allowed iTV to renegotiate its concession fees if the market changed substantially, which the former executives argue happened when state-run Channel 11 began accepting advertisements. End note.)

¶18. (SBU) Separately, a group claiming to represent 9,000 individual investors said it would file a complaint against the PMO and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for failing to suspend trading in iTV shares after the high court ruling.

#### Comment

¶17. (SBU) TiTV's final form remains far from certain. Disgruntled staff, irate shareholders, and lengthy court cases all bode poorly for a quick and tidy resolution to the station's status.

¶18. (SBU) Thai academics and media-law drafters are very interested in determining whether a public television station could really be independent, and if so how to craft the law to ensure this independence. The PMO has asked the Embassy to provide a DVC

BANGKOK 00002407 002.2 OF 002

program with an American public television expert (request septel) in order to discuss some of the nuts and bolts of setting up a truly independent public television station.

ARVIZU